

CONFESSING SINS TO A PRIEST?

October 29, 1996 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org) -

Pope John Paul II recently confirmed the necessity that Catholics regularly confess their sins to a priest. One of the verses twisted out of context in an attempt to support such a practice is James 5:16 --

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

The Greek word translated "fault" in James 5:16 is "paraptoma," which refers to "a side-slip, lapse, deviation, or error" (Strong). Elsewhere in the KJV it is translated "fall" (Rom. 11:11), "offence" (Rom. 4:25), "trespass" (Mt. 6:14), and "sin" (Eph. 1:7). Many new translations (such as the NIV and NASV) erroneously read "sin" instead of "faults" in Jam. 5:16 because they follow the modern critical Greek text which replaces the word "paraptoma" with "hamartia," the Greek word most commonly used for sin in the N.T. This, of course, gives support to the false Catholic idea of confessing one's sins to a man instead of directly to God.

The following comment from Barnes Notes on the New Testament exposes the error of Rome's dogma:

"This passage is one on which Roman Catholics rely to demonstrate the propriety of 'auricular confession,' or confession made to a priest with a view to an absolution of sin. The doctrine which is held on that point is, that it is a duty to confess to a priest, at certain seasons, all our sins, secret and open, of which we have been guilty; all our improper thoughts, desires, words, and actions; and that the priest has power to declare on such confession that the sins are forgiven. But never was any text less pertinent to prove a doctrine than this passage to demonstrate that. For, (1) the confession here enjoined is not to be made by a person in health, that he may obtain salvation, but by a sick person, that he may be healed (verses 14-15). (2) As mutual confession is here enjoined, a priest would be as much bound to confess to the people as the people to a priest. (3) NO MENTION IS MADE OF A PRIEST AT ALL, or even of a minister of religion, as the one to whom the confession is to be made. (4) The confession referred to is for 'faults' with reference to 'one another,' that is, where one has injured another; and nothing is said of confessing faults to those whom we have not injured at all. (5) THERE IS NO MENTION HERE OF ABSOLUTION, either by a priest or any other person. (6) If anything is meant by absolution that is scriptural, it may as well be pronounced by one person as another; by a layman as a clergyman. All that it can mean is, that God promises pardon to those who are truly penitent, and this fact may as well be stated by one person as another. NO PRIEST, NO MAN WHATEVER, IS EMPOWERED TO SAY TO ANOTHER EITHER THAT HE IS TRULY PENITENT, OR TO FORGIVE SINS. 'Who can forgive sins but God only?' Who can put himself in the place of God, and presume to pardon the sins which his

creatures have committed against him? (7) The practice of 'auricular confession' is 'evil, and only evil, and that continually.' Nothing gives so much power to a priesthood as the supposition that they have the power of absolution. Nothing serves so much to pollute the soul as to keep impure thoughts before the mind long enough to make the confession, and to state them in words. Nothing gives a man so much power over a female as to have it supposed that it is required by religion, and appertains to the sacred office, that all that passes in the mind should be disclosed to him. The very thing which a seducer would desire would be the power of knowing all the thoughts of his intended victim; and if the thoughts which pass through the soul could be known, virtue would be safe nowhere. Nothing probably under the name of religion has ever done more to corrupt the morals of a community than the practice of auricular confession" (Barnes).